

THREE

The Invisible Labour Process – A Study of Daydreams at Work

There, on my forklift, most of the time isolated from the world, I would spend my working hours composing songs about our situation. I suppose this was my little resistance struggle in my head, zooming up to the base stores and back. When the tunes rolled fast I would work like a maniac, driving my coworkers insane because the materials would pile up in front of them. When the songs were slower then I suppose life improved for them.¹

Songs that were composed by Alfred Temba Qabula in the 'head', as well as poems and play narratives that found their public expression in 1984, made him one of the most prominent worker creators in the South Africa.² His special world of reveries, compositions and daydreams at work, though, has serious implications for a science of working life and sociology, as much as it has for literature.

Introduction

In this text I want to focus on the relationship between working and daydreaming in order to develop a few observations about dreamwork in its own right; the relationship between mechanical work and daydreaming³; and the relationship between adjustment and resistance by individuals in modern work processes and institutions.

There is a sense from the above quotation that in the course of complex labour processes in which people such as Qabula worked as isolated and externally coordinated units, there is also an *invisible* labour process. One senses also that there is some relationship between the modern, repetitive, mechanical processes and this 'invisible' craft, and both bear some further relationship to work performance. This 'relationship' permits a disjunction between what the hands are doing and what the brain or psyche is doing.

For Qabula, the *content* of his headcraft embodied a dignified resistance. The songs were laments about conditions of life; the lyrics were full of redemptive wishes; his poems were political tracts. They were what Ernst Bloch called a repository of utopian wishes

beyond oppressive social systems.⁴ They were moments of visionary transcendence, of an 'anticipatory consciousness', even at work. But they were ambiguous too, because the hands and his forklift were intensifying productivity in the plant; as the 'tunes rolled fast', so did the labour process.

The separation between conception and execution, between hand and brainwork, between manual and mental labour has been central to the emergence of repetitive, monotonous work in modern industry. It has been common to systems of production identified as 'Taylorist' or 'Fordist'.⁵ Such a separation stands at the core of industrial experience and many studies have amplified the psychological and social problems 'meaningless' work has created.⁶ It also stands at the core of the possibility of daydreaming at work. Had work been creative, a healthy combination of thought and action, varied and interesting, daydreaming on the job would signal a loss of concentration, tiredness or distraction.⁷ But in monotonous work routines, daydreamwork and reveries facilitate a way of coping with such tedium, however dangerous in industrial settings. The content itself can also be a significant register of forms of consciousness, not easily accessible to the mere observation of behaviour.

Studies of Reveries and Daydreams in Industry

To investigate our subject matter, we find our thoughts bouncing between the concerns of industrial psychology and industrial sociology. Or, better, within the parameters of a science of work that refuses to 'dissolve individuals inside a bath of sulphuric acid'.⁸ In questioning workers and discussing with them the world of daydreams, reveries, fantasies and compositions, we shall be establishing that these 'invisible processes' are as definitive of behaviour in public as visible processes are. It will also claim to throw some light on the relationship between isolated individuals, their work, their 'informal groups' and 'cultural formations'.

Elton Mayo, the founding father of industrial sociology, was a pioneer in identifying 'reveries', and 'daydreams' as a feature of anomic work relations. His early work on cotton factories in 1923/4 posited that the repetitive and isolated work of a modern manufacturing mill was 'backbreaking' (therefore his interest in fatigue), and also contributed to workers' daydreams and reveries being haunted by pessimistic currents.⁹ Both factors militated against the 'spontaneous co-operation' of workers with managers and ushered in a period of declining productivity. Mayo recommended more rest breaks, declared a war on fatigue and achieved, as he claims, higher productivity levels. What Mayo avoided concerning himself with after these feats was the fate of workers' reveries and their substance.

Mayo, though, after the Hawthorne experiments, together with the 'gang' of Whitehead and Roethlisberger and Dickson, proceeded to identify informal groups amongst workers that evolved their own autonomous principles of work and formed their own social codes, which were in conflict with the formal economic logic of managements.¹⁰ Reacting against 'anomic' pressures, 'destructive of all historic, social and personal

relationships'; faced with what Durkheim saw as dissatisfaction, powerlessness and even despair', in which, a 'horde of individuals each seeking despairingly the means of selfpreservation', they forged informal associations.¹¹

For the Mayoites, managements were insensitive to workers' sociocultural needs, and they were unschooled in the social skills necessary to handle oppositional codes. They were incapable of procuring the 'spontaneous co-operation' of their employees through teamwork. The human relations school that they founded argued that 'any industrial organisation is at once a way of working – which must be technically expert and effective and also a way of living for many people'.¹² By understanding the social needs of workers, by improving the social skills of bosses, by improving through that the communication between them, modern management would create the foundation towards the *normative* adjustment or integration of workers to the goals of business. Otherwise, 'the working group as a whole [would] actually determine the output of individual workers' by reference to different standards.¹³

Informal groups and, later, games workers played to ameliorate the boredom of repetitive work have oscillated from being seen as elements of resistance to being defined as mechanisms of adjustment, or both. The image of a fork-lift driver composing songs in his head as a response to routine work could be read as a peculiar game of resistance *and* adjustment. In a long line of industrial sociology, workers' visible behaviour and their accounts for it ran down similar debating tracks.

Michael Burawoy's work is a recent sophistication of the argument – 'the games workers play are not, as a rule, autonomously created in opposition to management, as claimed by Elton Mayo'. He declares instead that 'they emerge historically out of struggle and bargaining, but they are defined within the limits defined by minimum wages and acceptable profit margins the inexorable coercion of coming to work, and subordination to the dictates of the labour process once there, as from the emergence of "radical needs", "a new vision of work", or a "non-logical code"'. The game is entered into for its relative satisfactions . . . The satisfaction of that need reproduces not only "voluntary servitude" (consent) but also greater material wealth.'¹⁴

Burawoy's study of how consent to managerial rule is manufactured at enterprise level was also an exemplary study of the games workers played to adjust to the dictates of the work process. By returning to the central concerns of plant sociology initiated by Mayo and sophisticated by Roy, he shows how exploitation is both secured and obscured by workers willingly surrendering and intensifying the expenditure of their labour power.¹⁵

In an admirable way, microstudies such as Roy's and Burawoy's point to the irreducibility of concrete behaviour to broader social considerations. If one assumed that each outbreak of conflict was a manifestation of a broader struggle (or broader structural conflict in society) – his and other workers' militancy could be read from such processes. Conflictual behaviour *happened* to them; they do not 'strike', they are 'struck' by broader structural collisions. It can explain neither the *form* this militancy takes nor the times, very lengthy in duration, during which no conflictual behaviour occurs. Without losing sight of the broader social dynamics, particular factory politics and relations have their

own murmurings that constitute determinants for social action. But I would go further; our invisible headcraft *could* also be a serious determinant of social action.

But the opposite is also unsatisfactory. The outbreak of conflict, or its accommodation, cannot be the manifestation of the aggregate of individual grievances and their internalised (pent-up) reveries and wishes. From its conventional psychosociological expositions to its more 'radical' ones,¹⁶ what must not be lost is the 'already', or the 'ever-ready' collective belonging of individuals.

In other contexts, I have argued and presented findings that black workers in South Africa respond to the anomic or alienating pressures around them by generating what I termed 'defensive combinations'. In the hostel, the compound, the township or at work, workers absorbed and transformed pressures through such combinations. On the basis of these there arose 'cultural formations' that were definitive of identities, behaviour and practice.¹⁷

I submit that it is these cultural formations that generate 'narrative streams' in which and through which reveries and our invisible labour processes are crafted. Furthermore, old struggles and new struggles provide the landscapes through which these streams flow. Therefore, it makes a difference whether you are a worker in a US steel mill or in South Africa – past struggles and forms of accommodation and resistance matter.

To look at daydreams or reveries, furthermore, as simple manifestations of resistance or accommodation, is limiting. This invisible labour process, it shall be argued, is made possible by both a recoil and a refraction from the process of work.

Psychology and Daydreaming: The Private Theatre

Daydreaming and fantasising are commonplace activities; as such, they are rarely studied. They have not, for example, enjoyed the attraction that nightdreams have held for psychologists. Breuer and Freud have both left behind some scattered vertebrae that can facilitate a skeletal argument around the themes of our invisible day work.

Breuer commented that one of his hysteric patients, 'Anna O', had been left from childhood with an 'unemployed surplus of mental liveliness and energy'. This found expression in her imagination and in turn led to daydreaming – what Breuer succinctly defined as her 'private theatre' – which laid the foundation for the dissociation of her mental self. Such dissociation led finally after a traumatic shock to her hysterical behaviour. For Breuer, though, 'reveries and reflections during a more or less mechanical occupation do not in themselves imply a pathological state of consciousness since if they are interrupted – if for instance the subject is spoken to – the normal unity of consciousness is restored'. The relationship between mechanical occupations and the emergence within each mechanical worker of a 'private theatre' is of importance for our discussions.¹⁸

Daydreams, for Freud, like dreams, are wish fulfilments. Like dreams they are based to a greater extent on impressions of infantile experiences. Like dreams they benefit from a certain degree of relaxation of censorship. If we examine their structure, we shall perceive

the way in which wishful purpose that is at work in their production has mixed up the material of which they are built, has rearranged it and has formed it into a new whole. Like dreams they can be brought under an analytic process that studies 'dreamwork' through their latent content, through an understanding of condensation, displacement, repression and symbolisation. The only difference between daydreams and nightdreams is that daydreams lack the total somatic experience the nocturnal reveries involve.¹⁹

Frigga Haug recently addressed herself to the debate and study of daydreams. In a provocative piece of feminist scholarship she situates herself against emancipatory readings of dreamwork. For her, daydreams are no code for transcendence or resistance, but 'register the social circumstances in which people live'. They also register the contradictory effects of the social structure. For women, such registries must be noted, 'not only that they involve dreaming instead of changing, fantasising instead of acting, but also that all wishes remain with or within the walls of the ideological: love at first sight, fulfilment in surrendering one's life to a single person'.²⁰

For Haug, daydreams are 'a deliberate and conscious construction of the imaginary: they arrange people in constellations, activities, situations in imaginary scenes and adventures, where the dreamer has the main role'. She adds that 'the topic of daydreams, with its themes of "flight", "fantasy", "imagination" and "withdrawal" takes us into the twilight zone. While its daylight aspect still leaves it open to analysis and rational discussion, its dreamside reflects a darker inner life, a sliding into hysteria, disease, psychic disturbance.'²¹ For Haug, gendered relations of power haunt her subjects' daydreams. In this discussion, dealing with workers in KwaZulu-Natal factories, we have also to be aware of the defining issue of race. Here the 'construction of self' or 'subjectivity' might also follow narrative streams drenched in racial stereotyping. The absorption and expression of racial categories and feelings, after all, continues to be South Africa's daily bread. Yet the relationship between race and dreamwork has not been studied. There are many insightful comments on the affinity between anxiety, bad faith and colonial domination pioneered by Frantz Fanon.²² Here psychologists like Chabani Manganyi looked at reveries as a creative outburst, or as reactive paroxysms to the racial power of the 'other'. Similarly, Bonginkosi Nzimande's injunction for a science of the individual in black communities has still to yield sufficient research to help the study of daydreams.²³

Despite such shortcomings, this study needs to weave together four interrelated investigations. The first is the relationship between forms of mechanical work and Breuer's 'private theatre'. To find out, that is, whether and how black workers act out such narratives inside their heads in their daily lives. The second looks at the manifest and latent content of such dreamwork²⁴ in order to appreciate the implications of daydreaming at work. In doing this we need to outline the sense of 'self' that our theatre's protagonists construct. The third tests Frigga Haug's claims more strictly, on the basis of interviews with workers within specific sociotechnical environments and cultural formations. The fourth sees whether race and gender affect our class experiences and how they manifest themselves in the labour process.

The Study

Elton Mayo argued that the monotonous and anomic nature of modern work processes is the source of pessimistic reveries. Since the days of his pioneering work, though, many studies have described how different labour processes in modern industry create different experiences of work and different levels of job satisfaction. Indeed, Richard Blauner's study *Alienation and freedom*²⁵ has been the most influential in demonstrating how alienation and powerlessness increase in mass production, assembly line and repetitive jobs, and decrease the more autonomous and/or automated work becomes. Any research therefore that explores worker experiences has to be sensitive to the varieties of work organisation and the objective constraints they create for individuals.

Following Blauner's 'idealtypical' forms of work organisation, and adding one of my own, I selected five types of labour process that provide us with a research framework: (1) artisan labour, (2) assembly line work, (3) machine operating, (4) continuous processing and (my own addition) (5) domestic work. I have sought in the first case to interview a cluster of artisans (three) who work in carpentry/furniture shops that are not standardised in their work processes. In the second I have sought to speak to car assembly workers (four) and in the third I have sought to speak to machine operators in the food and cotton sector (seven). The chemical sector provided the exemplars for the fourth (three); and finally, three domestic women workers complete the picture. I have tried to make my study as sensitive as possible to gender issues, but I found it difficult to communicate with people who were either older or much younger than I am.

The average age of the interviewees was 35 years old. Finally, I have avoided discussing or probing for erotic daydreams unless volunteered by the people themselves: this felt awkward and forced. These are, after all, secret worlds, revealed to us through trust and care.

The 20 interviews occurred over a period of five months between July and October 1990. They involved two sessions of approximately one-and-a-half hours with each interviewee. The interviews were open-ended, using thematic prods to facilitate the subjects' story telling. The interviews in short would start from socio-biographical questions, move towards descriptions of concrete work experiences, and finally move towards questions around daydreaming at work.

Of course the process of research differs from the process of presentation. For illustrative purposes I chose an individual per type of work process to be the exemplar of his or her group. His or her life experience and biography are being presented to provide the context for the presentation of daydreams. Later the presentation of contents of daydreams and their analysis relied on all the recounted daydreams by all the interviewees. Unfortunately, a chapter like this can do justice to very few of the narratives elicited.

Men and Women at Work

Joe Webster was one of the three skilled workers interviewed. He started work for a furniture company, after being apprenticed by his uncle in Port Elizabeth. He found the work there boring and killing. He left and worked in many combinations with other 'coloured' contractors in the building industry, mainly doing fittings and some renovations. This has occupied him since 1983, but the recession really 'hit' the building industry and he hoped to start a new permanent job in Gauteng, being in charge of a maintenance team. He was pleased at the idea of going over onto a stable salary, though he hated supervision.

Joe Webster had lived for 15 years in Wentworth, a so-called coloured township to the south of Durban which is infamous for its high pollution levels from the industry around it, for its ruthless gangs, its enormous alcohol consumption, its high migration rates and its buttressing of a sizeable artisan class. Webster worked either alone in fitting out shops and houses, or with a work team of African workers. At times of limited work his team of four doubled up in the building industry proper. A crucial difference in work with or without the team was that he never took a *dop* ['drink'] when they were all together. 'I have enough problems with their *dopping*,' he added wryly.

Joe's jobs ranged from solving demanding problems of design and execution to rather repetitive, cutting, chiselling, sandpapering, hammering tasks and a little machining. His tools were a great source of discussion, comment and criticism. 'There is nothing as nice as a good little woodworking machine, or a well-made chisel. You can talk to them.' He feels proud to demonstrate his knowledge of brands, quality of workmanship and longevity. The same with wood: he claimed that the market was saturated with rubbish, as the pine was usually warped and the other wood beyond people's pockets. All the manufactured boards – chipboard, blackboard and so on – were 'rubbish', but people liked rubbish.

The more complex the job, the more interesting and totally absorbing. Sometimes the job was dangerous, so that it demanded total concentration. Even boring aspects demanded precision, to get the joints exactly right, to get the angles ship-shape. But mostly, of late, according to him, the jobs were rather standard: you could do them blindfolded. When a job got boring, he put on music and he got, by his own admission, very soppy when they put on country and western songs or 'those' ballads. He spent a lot of time making pictures in his head from the lyrics and these became entry points to daydreams.

But he also admitted that sometimes he got into the 'morbs', where his head got stuck into insoluble problems and that's when he drank to make it nice and easy. We shall see later that this is a common denominator in many mechanical jobs. That is, when he got into what Mayo identified as *pessimistic reveries*, a kind of inner speech monologue about hardship and fatalism: 'I tell myself that I was no good, never been any good . . . you know what you expect of me . . . no good . . . others have it good . . . their life is gin and tonic . . . but I never set a foot right . . . always something short . . . you are nothing

man . . . they all treat you like nothing, and I tried, you know . . . And this kind of wah-wahwah in your head drives you crazy.'

A distinctive feature of Joe's job was that he was more or less in control of the pace of work. Within the broad parameters of the contract, he accelerated or decelerated the expenditure of his labour power. He slackened or worked harder over normal hours. He followed the rhythms of radio tunes or he took cigarette breaks and went for chats. Sometimes, of course, he had to work to fulfil an obligation at breakneck speeds; yet unlike most workers, his was a different and diverse working pattern.²⁶

Siza, by contrast, had worked his way into a machine operator's position. In the factory he was working in at Prospecton he operated a lathe that shaped engine components for motorcars. He machined components of four different sizes and set the tools and dies. Sometimes, when there was a complex job to be done or a new design, his white supervisor, who was a skilled fitter and turner, helped with the readjustments. But in the main Siza's job was standardised and, after the first nine months, quite simple.

He lived in Umlazi, where he was renting a room from a local homeowner. His family and three young children stayed at Umkomaas. He visited them as often as possible. Yet his newly acquired 'status' as a shop steward made it increasingly difficult to find any leisure time. Although he had been a heavy drinker a few years back, he had stopped because he was constantly feeling rotten. Like many others he would *dop* himself before work, or smoke it up and just 'hang in there', without any head, just a machine doing its job.

Unlike Joe, Siza had very little to say about machining, or the quality of metals he worked with. He was very much aware that his contribution was a small part in a much larger effort to make cars. He could talk about the smell of heated metal, of lubricants, of the need to pay attention to avoid mistakes.

He was in Mayo's terms an isolated member of a 'horde', externally coordinated by minimum production quotas. Within an hour he could vary the speed of his machining. Retaining an even tempo, going faster to beat the quota, or taking a 'breather' were all restricted variations on a job that was in essence repetitive. Sometimes he lost himself, he admitted, as if he got sucked in by the labour process. He became 'mesmerised' and needed to catch himself with a jerk – in these instances he did not remember what had happened and how.

For him too daydreams and reveries were commonplace. He triggered himself into familiar stories that he had been constructing for years, but their flow was interrupted all the time by the motor functions. Setting up for lathing frequently fragmented the story and it was difficult to get into it again. Sometimes the stories became just pictures, flashes of pictures that did not fall together into a story line. His brain also began working on problems – his family problems back home, trade union problems or church-related duties that demanded planning. These also were frustrated by an inability to be strung together. This for him was the height of his frustration, where he felt he could not cope with work or with his life. There was a sharp contrast, he claimed, between his daydreams, where he was powerful, and the reveries, which were depressing and pessimistic. Like

Joe, he got the 'morbs'; unlike him, though, many of his reveries were addressed to the Lord as moans about his fate.²⁷

Joe's and Siza's working lives presented the broad terrain of working experience in which most workers found themselves. The rest of the participants presented our investigation with few variations.

Beatrice worked as a sewing machine operator in Durban. Her job was to sew collars on shirts – small, medium and large. She worked in a line, next to another woman who did the same. The difference was that Beatrice's job involved male attire. The main component in her job was speed.

She was generally dissatisfied with her work and complained about being unwell because of it. She would rather have spent time doing domestic chores, or even working as a domestic worker. But in the capacity of domestic worker, she stressed, she would be earning very little and working very odd hours. She also complained about headaches. There were days when she found the noise on the factory floor unbearable. She also complained about the loud music the management piped out for their 'pleasure'.

Beatrice had her own sewing machine at home, so the tasks she performed at work were particularly boring. As a result of the type of work she did, she wanted to use her own machine less and less. Three years back she would spend hours making clothes for her children and herself and enjoy it as a creative process.

Like Siza, she was coordinated by an output rate that she could meet very easily. So she found herself playing 'games': intensifying or slackening her effort, breaking little records, sewing in slow motion and so on. In the old days she had felt pleased when the line supervisor congratulated her on her diligence, but the thrill has gone. In fact, part of her time and that of her immediate workmates was spent in sending the supervisor up, grimacing about her and repeating her phrases. Unlike Siza, her job afforded some communication with the other 'girls' on the line: usually monosyllabic exchanges, grunts, gestures and jokes.

But like all the others she slipped into a world of her head and spent hours constructing stories about her imaginary life. She stressed, though, that these narratives were 'jumpy', 'they come and go' and that she had difficulties in keeping the threads together. They were also distorted and displaced by worries and anxieties. Her home was in KwaMakhutha, an area that had been racked by violence since 1989. She and her children had been in constant danger; schooling had collapsed; and she claimed to lose her head in constant lamentation and images of fear.²⁸

Moses's job was to yank in and secure the wheels on cars that move down an assembly line at a steady pace of one every three to four minutes. Initially he found the job threatening, backbreaking and unsettling. A year later he was in control of the job: 'It's like a dance you know well, your body moves with the rhythm.'

He 'coped' by playing 'games' with co-workers: delaying his effort or slowing it down so that it almost became a disaster for the next person on the line. Like Beatrice, they also broke records by speeding up and causing 'grief' with the line supervisors. The

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immediate workers around him 'smoked' themselves into oblivion and there was a lot of alcohol abuse too.

Apart from complaining about a whole range of ailments, he felt that he was losing himself at work. There were days when he could not clearly remember what had happened and there are all these little stories that flashed through his mind. He also found himself conducting little dialogues with imaginary others over a great number of topics. He spent a lot of time singing aloud or in his head, but also a lot of time worrying about issues: financial, familial and 'love-related'.²⁹

Elias's work in a chemical factory demanded very little human intervention in the labour process. His job involved measuring out the correct mixes of the synthetic and chemical materials that went into the process; calculating the correct amounts and timing the process of 'mixing'; initiating that process and supervising the control panels so that no mishaps occurred; and at the right time releasing the 'brew' to its next phase. His work involved spurts of highlevel pressurised activity. At times he had to concentrate so that he did not make an 'expensive' mistake, but the job also involved lots of 'breathers'.

Unlike the other workers interviewed, Elias's contribution to the factory was recognised by management and he was encouraged to go for further training. His job process also gave him an opportunity to talk to other workers on the factory floor, as it involved bursts of high concentration and laxity. His reveries and private performances occurred in the lax periods, unlike most of the above. Sometimes he spent hours imagining himself in a variety of adventures, but a lot of the time was spent worrying about what was happening in the township to his family and to his friends.³⁰

Mary worked in the 'kitchens': she was a domestic worker in a Durban suburb. She claimed she did everything from the highly demanding and fussy work of cooking and keeping stock of the household to making the beds and scrubbing the floors. Her employers worked. The children went to high school and came back with their demands in the afternoon. But at least half of her long day she spent alone.

During her working hours the radio fed her with chatter and songs and, like Joe, many entry points into daydreaming. Her work ranged from high concentration to total tedium and she controlled her rhythms of work within the parameters of the daily chores. When the radio was not on, she spent a lot of time singing hymns and praying. She was a deeply religious person, and her after-work life revolved totally around church activities. Her children lived in a rural area with her mother. Their father had left them all years ago. Since 1989 Mary had lived on her employers' property. She was trying to save for a place in the township to bring her children back.³¹

From Joe's precision work to Mary's cooking pots, from Moses's assembling to Elias's mixing mechanisms, an obvious point emerged: mechanical labour processes, with their stark production rhythms, created a peculiar environment that isolated workers. On the basis of this, a frustrated and fragmented dreamwork emerged alongside a world of reveries. This, as many commented, was physically dangerous. Nevertheless, the content of their 'private theatres' needs exposition.

Texts of Dream Accounts

According to Paul Ricoeur, 'it is not the dream as dreamed that can be interpreted, but rather the text of the dream account'.³² I have had to separate artificially the 'oral texts' of my interviewees, or better the 'contents' of these invisible processes, into three groups: (1) daydreams proper, (2) internal discourses or narratives (3) and snapshots of imagery. Of the first type, I have gathered 29, of the second 16, and of the third 12. They break down into daydreams that, briefly put, have feats of prowess (such as sport) as their main theme; they are epic stories, akin to tragedies; they constitute 'revenge' dreams; they resemble soap operas; they involve erotic encounters; they reflect on homecomings. The second variety, namely internal discourses, are problematising narratives, speech monologues or soliloquies. The third group are a disparate rush of images, which will be briefly summed up below.

Daydreams

Feats of prowess, especially sporting feats, were the commonest (eight). There the 'self', as central character, existed in an unending drama of plots, subplots and movements, and emerged as heroic in the eyes of crowds and audiences. Webster, for one, daydreamed around horseracing. This was an activity that on normal weekends (and Wednesdays) usurped most of his earnings. But in his dreamwork not only was he a successful horseowner with stables and many horses, each with a name, but he was also a jockey. In this role he was a champion who, although larger than jockeys, had a special sensitive technique that he worked out carefully with his horses (of course his horses were specially trained too) that allowed him to win. But such a daydream grew in complexity and never ended, because frustrating interruptions in the work process or endless byeways meant that it was never completed.

Siza played 'No. 10' for Kaizer Chiefs. At times he was a middleweight boxing champion. He also ran the Comrades Marathon on rare occasions. But as No. 10 he was a special hero in the games: when it rained he was that person with extra daring, injured, muddled, with a myriad obstacles, who scored the crucial goal, and became the pal of his soccer idol, Teenage Dladla, who saved situations. Again his dreams became more complicated through the paroxysms of mechanical work and its interruptions.

Seven of these daydreams narrated, in epic form, major social dramas. Here a crowd did not observe the feats of our hero. Instead the central character became embroiled in the conflict of the plots. She or he saved the Hlobane miners; rescued the women of 'his' section from their vigilante captors; convinced the boss of the evils of his ways through township adventures; fought back for the ancestral lands around Eshowe; saved people from floods; converted them to Christianity, suffered in jail and emerged liberated through solidarity actions, went to Johannesburg and emerged a wealthy man.

An extremely interesting cluster of daydreams (five) concerned revenge narratives. Here the characters were more vividly 'real' than in the previous examples. Revenge was meted out to actual people who were involved in a traumatic relationship with the

dreamer. In Joe's case it involved a gangster who was notorious in his community and who had twice mortally insulted him and his sister too in the past and who loomed large in his life. Elias had framed an Indian shopkeeper who used to sell his family gas and who had slapped him some years ago for 'lying'. For Beatrice it was a warlord in Kwa-Makhutha, who was responsible for killing her cousin. For Moses and Siza, they were a white official and employer respectively, who had belittled them, laughed at them in public, and in Siza's case, had sworn at him and insulted his 'manhood'.

In all of this the actual offender was inserted almost as the 'bad guy' into films in various contexts. The narrative in turn moved towards forms of retribution: beating, belittling, public judgement and, in the latter two cases, killing. In Joe's and Beatrice's case, others did the killing. Yet in each one strata and strata of fictional adventures and real references were layered over the narrative.

An equivalent amount of daydreams had the structural components of a pop melodrama, akin to a soap opera. A mixture of imaginary and live characters was involved in an endless process of tragically breaking up and coming together again around the central hero. Some of the narratives were about the betrayal of a loved one, family misunderstandings and conflict. The hero emerged as the facilitator: the person around whom sparks flew and resolutions were achieved such as bringing together estranged parents; or resolving misunderstood love betrayals.

Three of the daydreams (volunteered by men workers) involved 'erotic narratives'. They included the complex winning over of a woman (changing all the time between people they knew and television personalities) followed by elaborate, fragmented love scenes.

Finally, two of the narratives involved exile or migration and homecoming. The central character returned home and, through a variety of adventures, reintegrated himself or herself into a prized social position. The settings for both were mainly rural.

A crucial point about all the daydreams I have enumerated was their real-time incompleteness. The interviewees told me stories and narratives that they were completing verbally for me. In some cases they were describing in summary form the main elements of the dream. At the same time at work in their fantasy time they all remained incomplete, irresolute, fragmented and sometimes postponed through intricate subplots.

Reveries

All the workers identified forms of internal speech, or an endless murmur of thoughts, arguments, statements that occupied their heads while working. Such 'monologues', or 'voices' as one described them, were, like daydreams, fragmentary and interrupted by rhythms of work or distractions. Most were pessimistic excursions: they bemoaned the workers' fate and condition in life; they spoke of suffering; they addressed the Lord about misfortune; and they described worries.

Some were declamatory or dialogic: they addressed themselves to a variety of 'yous' that shifted from topic to topic. For example: 'You said we could have Saturday off, and now you say we can't. You always promise us everything and you never keep your word.'

It's as if I never sacrificed anything for you. It's as if I have not sweated and ignored the good things in life just to please you, and when I suffered you never noticed. That's it always with me. Never being allowed to have anything. You don't know. You don't even know what I've been through . . .'

Whether such reveries were 'dream-like' or 'dialogic', workers spoke about worries that were occupying their 'murmurs' coupled with frustration that they could not turn these into thoughts and plans for overcoming the problems. The largest worrying mechanism for *both* had to do with the violence in Natal and impending deaths, and the immediate horror of township existence.

Camera Eye

A feature of both daydreams and reveries was that they often fragmented into spasmodic flashes of images and pictures – something like a slide and tape show or a camera eye that snaps away at images that are loosely hold together by association with moments of 'stuckness' and discomfort. This created acute stress if coupled with worries and attempts to plan and control one's life coherently.

The Self of the Private Theatres

The texts or plots of the workers' private theatres, as Haug insists, revolve around the 'self' as protagonist. But the self is enmeshed in layers of sociotheatrical relations that are instructive on the issues of both race and gender.

Race

That all the interviewees were black blunts some of our capacity to speak confidently about racial dynamics. Nevertheless, such dynamics are foregrounded and figured enough to isolate four features:

- In most daydreams (17), whites appear as 'coefficients of adversity'. They are the people who place obstacles in our heroes' and heroines' paths. They are the figures of authority that constantly frustrate their aspirations. They range from the insensitive journalists who report badly on 'performances' to officers of the law who victimise; from the supporters of violence to jailers and warders. They are predominantly so, although in eleven of the 'texts' such roles are also handed over to black people.
- In six cases whites appear as a source of emulation. These narratives make our protagonists join successful and wealthy whites or, in the case of two of the domestic workers, they run households like them.
- In three cases, involving black men, white women are part of desire schemes. In two of the cases they are secret erotic lovers and in one a distant admirer.
- In two cases racialised situations are the subjects of revenge narratives. They are dragged out of their comforts to face the people. In one case they are killed.

Gender

The dream accounts reflect differences within and across gender boundaries. Men and women give each other roles that are stereotypical – relationships of power and desire punctuate the narratives in predictable ways.

Women see their own gender boundaries defined by security and conflict. In most cases, (eight) the dominant supportive familial and caring characters were other women. The mother figures who dispense selfless support and counsel and their own age sets that co-operate with one another to create a sense of security both feature strongly in their daydreams.

In half of these, women together were seen as active agencies trying to act in ways that could control the narrative of the story. The other half presented a sense of 'being-victim-in-the-world'. For instance, one of the domestic workers described the heroic ways in which women returned alongside one another to their drowning homesteads during the 1987 floods and, admittedly with a lot of prayer and help from God, saved people and livestock; changed the situation of corruption over relief money and support that headmen hoarded for themselves; and converted people into true Christian believers. Another domestic worker described her victimisation in her rural homestead by ruthless warlords and men of power and showed that she stoically absorbed suffering until 'her' men returned from their migrant contracts over Christmas and the revenge narrative begins, with women in a supportive secondary role.

Yet women do not see their own gender boundary only as a site of security. From their accounts it is also a site of jealousy, conflict and competition. Negative and oppressive figures were also women who betrayed them, lied about them, cheated on them, oppressed them and hurt them. Within this boundary a tension emerged: the closest and most meaningful relationships, and the most fractious and conflictual relationships were between women.

This tension also existed in the portrayal of women in every daydream narrative accounted for by the women workers of this study. Differences existed only in their 'self' portrayal as initiators or victims (discussed below in the section on cultural formations).

Similar tensions punctuated the roles given to men in the women's private theatres. Men were oppressors, perpetrators of violence, evil, but also lovers, admirers, supporters and in many cases good people. The relationships between them were defined by the dominant values with men being the patriarchs. In her study Frigga Haug noted how women, through their daydreams, escaped their everyday condition, only to run away to a lonely beach where they would encounter another man, a better man and lapse back into the gender trap. Here women were similarly cast in a web of gender relations, but their cultural formations seemed to generate another logic: there were no escapes to solitary beaches, but returns to homesteads or familiar and sympathetic shelters.

Ambiguities defined the relationships between men too. Within their gender boundary other men were a source of combat, conflict and competition. But they were also a source of solidarity, friendship and care. From the 'sporting feats' in their heroic theatre to the 'revenge' narratives men were a source of cooperation and friction.

Men, though, tended to give women predictable roles in their private theatres. Except for one example, good women were a source of support, childcare and adult care. They were also a source of admiration for male feats. They constituted a large number of the 'crowds' that relished the 'performance'. Bad women looked after bad men, to use a cliché, and/or, like their male counterparts, they were the planners of evil doings. In the social dramas of breakup and reconciliation, women gained special status through their self-sacrifices to effect a moral outcome.

What was strikingly obvious from the 'texts' of dreamworks, though, was that 'race' and 'gender' did not constitute relationships between people in the abstract: primordial men against women, or blacks against whites. They were constructed within the limits of existing cultural formations. Solidarity, conflict, friction, status and struggle, escape and reconciliation only made sense within such limits or 'streams' and within them narratives flowed.

Cultural Formations

Daydreams occurred within tangible landscapes and fields of action – they created the contours for the performances of extraordinary and imaginary *selves*, selves that were different from every worker's daily life. Siza's soccer game was within the range of his and his co-workers' leisure time. The team was none other than the champions Kaiser Chiefs adored by so many of his black worker friends. It was a dream cast half in contemporary, half in historical terms. Teenage Dladla and Marks Maponyane, his keen teammates, no longer played for the club. The prizes for such efforts of performance were the BobSave and the Castle League cups. Yet in the process of performance, Siza struggled to gain the adulation of crowds, of women, of friends, of family. His playing was of the old 'township' style: exhibitionist, aggressive and 'magical'. But although the landscapes were familiar, the dream pushed beyond familiar and everyday life to the heroic, but as yet unlived, present.

Beatrice's world was KwaMakhuta and Sipofu (the rural area from which she came) with their violence – political and social. The 'other' and the 'oppressor' were tangible men: warlords, councillors and gangsters. Her friends were women, relatives and neighbours. Her comfort came from her church or from traditional medicines. Her anxieties seem to come from having received *lobola* from a man and then being abandoned. Her world was tangible; her daydreams, like Siza's, reach beyond it.

One could continue in this vein to provide an example per interviewee in order to demonstrate a simple point: power, race, gender and class were all scripted within people's cultural formations. Understanding their narratives became an imperative to understand the ways of life and the patterns of community they subsisted in, in a 'relativist' fashion. What was universal was that people do absorb these lives by refracting and recoiling from their pressures. They did so by scripting selves that were understandable within their everyday lives and their constraints, which were, at the same time, irreducible to them.

The Self's Self-making

Although the manifest content of daydreams, reveries and 'snapshots' could bring new sources of cultural self-expression by workers if 'tapped' creatively, these surface summaries are supposed to yield more to analysis. Does their 'latent' content betray the drives of wish fulfilment identified by Freud as the generative mechanisms of dreamwork? Or do they exemplify Haug's ideologically structured self-imaginings? What do they tell us about what Ricoeur terms 'the primitive speech of desire' or 'the private archaeology of the dreamer'?³³

Our analysis points to a self or selves that are being constructed, crafted or laboured in daydreams. These selves do not seem to have so much of a centre that holds them together (except that they are each a bio-unit) – they are all central protagonists in private dramas and yet they are fragmentary and dispersed.

The self emerging is a fragmentary one: it reflects the dreamwork of a sexual animal of speech that possesses drives and desires; but there is also an active brain that chisels away at problems and ideas. There is the anthropomorphic desire for recognition, transcendence and triumph; there is the potency to think teleologically; but there is also incoherence and fragmentation; an inability to integrate, almost a replica of the mechanical motions: a slide- and tape-like image of life. I submit that the Freudian conception of creatures of repressed sexual desire has to be modified by a broader anthropomorphic concept of a refractive and recoiling agency.

For Haug, such an agency is the product of gendered socialisation, albeit an ideology of domination that finds release through daydreams to reproduce the social order. An analysis of the manifest contents of our invisible labour process can give credit to the gendered power argument. Men workers wrote themselves into the private theatres as physically potent, as patriarchs in their homes, as the pillars of all social relations. Women workers wrote themselves as mothers, as carers, as childrearers. But what must not be lost is that both genders wrote narratives of their lives that went beyond what their factory lives denied.

But *how* they refracted from their conditions of life cannot be answered only through the mesh of dominant values. We need to understand two processes. First, we need to understand their cultural formations and how they allow for refraction and recoil.

Second, *within* such cultural formations gendered differences are crucial. The presumed roles of men and women, patriarchs and caring mothers and sisters frequent the daydreams collected. Whether machinists or domestic workers, the women respondents shared images that tied them within patriarchal relations despite their sense of independence and power. Similarly with the men, the aggressive masculinity of working-class life, the 'selfevident' male dominant roles were commonplace. But the legitimization of violence and revenge was common to all.

Nevertheless, alongside the strictures cultural formations and their gendered relations impose, there is an attempt to write oneself into narratives that anticipate a life that is for many unrealisable: a life of rewarding recognition, of dignified control and coordina-

tion of one's life project, of desires for what is inaccessible – materially, sexually – yet a narrative written within the physical conditions of a violent workingclass environment. But it is an 'attempt', that workers find impossible to write or complete.

It is less a theatre of 'anticipatory consciousness'; it is rather a theatre of refracted and unarticulated desires that point beyond the conditions of life. They provide a sense of irreducibility to the grind of the life mill. They also provide a structure of feeling that is a determinant of social action and work habits.

The Significance of Daydreaming at Work

The debate between industrial sociologists as to whether workers' cultural formations are indices of patterns of resistance or accommodation or whether individual workers through games or daydreams adjust to or resist labour processes is insoluble. The discussion thus far points to worker capacities for both: by arguing that workers in their atomised work routines recoil from them and refract their pressures through reveries and daydreams, we leave the 'debate' purposely unresolved. In conclusion, Elton Mayo identified two significant aspects of industrial life: the existence of a pessimistic world of reveries; and the existence of informal groups with their own cultural formations. In both cases he tried to link his discoveries to a managerial effort to manufacture consent, or to generate, in his words, 'spontaneous cooperation'. Our analyses of daydreams have shown a cluster of psychic forces that accumulate in the lived experiences of working life.

Daydreams are so many scriptings of the self as a central character in a private theatre, and so many voices that speak in the head. They will continue to be generated as long as the material splicing of mental and manual labour in industry continues. They betray that social agents cannot be moulded into just a 'function', an abstract capacity to labour, and a unit in a labour process. A surplus always remains, recoiling and refracting the pressures. And the voices that speak in the head are sometimes recast in another theatre to speak aloud.